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## AN ANTILLEAN STATUETTE, WITH NOTES ON WEST INDIAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

By J. WALTER FEWKES

AMONG the undescribed specimens in the Smithsonian collections is the cast of a figure of stone that shows marked resemblance in technic to known Antillean idols. This image was not included among those considered in the author's memoir on the "Aborigines of Porto Rico,"<sup>1</sup> as its relationship was not recognized when that paper was prepared. Moreover, there is uncertainty regarding the place of origin of the specimen from which this cast was made. The resemblance in its technic to images from Santo Domingo, in the West Indies, is so pronounced and detailed that the author has prepared the following description, drawing attention to these resemblances and offering certain general observations on the character of the figure.

On consulting the National Museum catalogue, it was found that the cast was made in 1863 for the Smithsonian Institution from the original then in the collection of the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia, which apparently was deposited with other specimens in the collections of the Academy of Natural Sciences, possibly in 1879. On a visit made by the author to that institution, Miss H. Newell Wardle kindly showed him the original specimen and collected for him the scanty information available concerning it.

In the absence of reliable data to be had from catalogues or other sources with regard to the place of origin of this specimen,<sup>2</sup> the author is thrown back on its general character for conclusions regarding its cultural relationships. Fortunately the Antillean features of the image are so suggestive that its culture origin is well-nigh proved by them. If the specimen came from the mainland — a source of origin open to doubt — that fact would point to a cul-

<sup>1</sup> *Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology.*

<sup>2</sup> Judging from data at hand, it is not definitely proved that this specimen belonged to the Poinsett collection, to which it is sometimes ascribed.



FRONT, PROFILE, AND REAR VIEWS OF ANTILLEAN STATUETTE

tural connection between the West Indies and the Spanish mainland. It cannot seriously be maintained that the figure is a fabrication, as it was brought to the United States many years ago, before fraudulent productions had become so numerous. Evidently the maker of the original object was familiar with typical Antillean and Carib art, and must have seen similar objects in order to be able to combine in one specimen so many prehistoric West Indian features. No similar figure was known in scientific centers when the original or the cast was made. None of the several Mexicanists — Seler, Holmes, Saville, and others — to whom the author has shown the statuette or photographs of it, claims the figure as Mexican, and there is complete unanimity of belief that it is closely related in technic to images from the West Indies. The author believes this object is a true product of that culture which reached its highest development in prehistoric Porto Rico and Santo Domingo.

The illustrations that accompany this paper were made from photographs by Mr DeLancey Gill of the cast in the Smithsonian Institution; they reproduce the original (No. 12017) in the museum of the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup>

*Description of the Figure.* — The image (plate xviii), which is represented in a kneeling posture, resting on the knees and toes, — a posture unusual among known West Indian images, — is made of stone<sup>2</sup> and measures 13  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches in height.

The prominent shoulder-blades rise from the back of the head, the neck being undistinguishable from the body. The most marked feature of the idol is a disk, called the "canopy," raised slightly above the head; this is circular in form and measures three-fourths of an inch in thickness. Below the pedestal, on which the canopy is mounted, is a hood-like covering of the head, to which the shoulders and ears are attached and out of which the face seems to peer. It has been suggested that this hood represents a helmet or cap. Other characteristic features of the head are: face oval in shape; eyebrows prominent; nose large, with broad nostrils; mouth open, without representations of teeth; chin small; ears large,

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<sup>1</sup> The author takes this occasion to express his appreciation of the Academy's permission to publish this account.

<sup>2</sup> The most closely allied figures yet described are made of wood.

having their lower portions dilated with characteristic circular ornaments similar to those of other West Indian idols whether of the human or of the three-pointed form.

The arms are round and are not carved in relief on the sides of the body, but are free except at the points of attachment, the idols differing in these respects from most examples of primitive art, although sharing these peculiar features with Antillean idols made of wood, as exemplified in the Imbert specimen elsewhere described and figured. The arms may be described further as small and straight, with the hands resting on the thighs. On each upper arm are two knobs, one at the elbows and the other midway between the elbow and the shoulder. Similar enlargements are found on the arms of the wooden images in the Imbert collection, and in other specimens on the thighs or legs; these represent the bands which, according to older writers, the Antilleans (Carib) wore about the limbs to increase their size.

The backbone is a serrated ridge, suggesting that observable in other Antillean figures.

The buttocks appear slightly in relief and are rounded, one having a small dimple or depression as if a joint, suggesting the pits found in certain three-pointed stones and other zemis.<sup>1</sup>

The pose of the idol is such that the soles of the feet are turned backward, but the toes are bent in on the soles instead of being extended naturally. This feature is common in certain bone and shell carvings of Antillean fetishes, as those in the Archbishop Meriño collection. Small superficial enlargements, or pimples, indicate the extremity of one of the leg bones, as the fibula.

Least mention of these insignificant features may appear trivial, or at least not characteristic of Antillean art, attention is directed to the persistency of the same characteristics in several figures illustrated in the author's memoir before cited.<sup>2</sup>

It would appear that a feature so common in Antillean idols

<sup>1</sup> See *Aborigines of Porto Rico*, op. cit., pl. xxxvii, *a*; xxxix, *c*; xli, *b*; xliii, *a*, *c*; lxxvi, *a*.

<sup>2</sup> In *Twenty-fifth Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology*. See wooden statuette, pl. xc, *c*; carved figure at end of rib, pl. lxxxvii, *d*; in wooden stool or *duho*, pl. xciii, *a*; in clay effigy vase, pl. lxxxii, *a*; and in cloth zemi, fig. 214, it is found in both ankles.

of human form, viz., the enlargement representing the end of the fibula, reproduced in the object here dealt with, when combined with other similarities has some meaning. It may be said that this feature represents merely the extremity of one of the leg bones, but why, it may be asked, is it so constantly shown?

The abdominal and thoracic regions are represented as much reduced in size by the situation of the backbone, which appears drawn out of place by being attached to the back of the head. The navel is not shown, but the sexual organs are prominent as in all Antillean idols representing males.

There are several stone images of kneeling figures destitute of the *tabla*, or head canopy, with which this image has much in common. With respect to the position of the knees, the image on the end of a prehistoric Haitian pestle<sup>1</sup> is one of the closest approximations, notwithstanding the presence of the "lens" and its shaft attached to the back of the image changes somewhat the general appearance. A detailed examination of the figure which forms the subject of this paper convinces the author that its technic is purely Antillean and that, irrespective of the locality whence it came, the characteristics of West Indian art are strongly impressed on it. Although there are several published figures of idols from Santo Domingo with which the image under consideration might be confounded, the most striking are those shown on plate xc, c, c', c'', in the author's memoir on the "Aborigines of Porto Rico."

Perhaps the strongest points of likeness between this problematical figure and images undoubtedly brought from the Antilles are (1) the presence of a canopy on the head; (2) the carving of the face; (3) the form of the ears and their appendages; (4) the enlargements on the arms; (5) the character of the backbone. Of these resemblances the most characteristic perhaps is the canopy on the head, which is an almost constant feature of the Antillean idols made of wood. As first suggested by Mr T. A. Joyce,<sup>2</sup> this canopy may be a table (*tabla* of Herrera) on which were placed offerings for the idol beneath it. This place for offerings assumes somewhat

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., pl. xxiv, a.

<sup>2</sup> Prehistoric Antiquities from the Antilles in the British Museum, *Jour. Roy. Anthropol. Inst.*, xxxvii, 403-404.

different shapes in known wooden idols. It may have the form of a disk attached to the top of the head or of a flat circular plate mounted on a pedestal rising from a common base with the image. A special pedestal of this kind may be seen in a wooden image in the British Museum, illustrated by Mr Joyce, and another in the author's "Aborigines of Porto Rico" (plate xci, *a*, *a'*).

In his account of the aborigines of Haiti, the great Admiral says :

"But also in all the other islands and on the mainland [Cuba?] each has a house apart from the village in which there is nothing except some wooden images carved in relief which are called *Cemis*, nor is there anything done in such a house for any other object or service except for these *Cemis*, by means of a kind of ceremony and prayer which they go to make in it as we go to churches. In this house they have a finely-wrought table, round like a wooden disk, in which is some powder which is placed by them on the heads of these *Cemis* in performing a certain ceremony: then with a cane that has two branches which they place in their nostrils they snuff up this dust. The words that they say none of our people understand."

Regarding this table Herrera<sup>1</sup> says :

"Within the temple they have a well-made table (*tabla*), round in form, on which are placed certain powders with which they sprinkle the heads of the images with definite ceremonies, and with a cane of two branches which they place in their nostrils, they snuff up this powder; the words they say no Spaniard understands."

Of several other accounts of this table which might be mentioned, that of Davies<sup>2</sup> is instructive. He thus speaks of it as used among the Carib :

"It is requisite above all things that the home or hut into which the Boye is to enter should be very neatly prepared for his reception, that the little table which they call *matouton* should be furnished with *anakri* for *Maboya* — that is an offering of cassava and *onicon* for the Evil Spirit — as also with the first fruits of their gardens if it be the season of fruits."

The cassava mentioned is of course a symbolic food offering and

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<sup>1</sup> Dec. I, lib. III, cap. III, p. 67, Madrid, 1730. The statement is evidently taken from Columbus's account. Several other references to this *tabla* and its use in making offerings might be quoted.

<sup>2</sup> *History of the Caribby Islands*, London, 1666.

the onicon a drink, these representing the two great desires which underlie the material life and stimulate primitive men to perform rites and ceremonies.

If the "canopy" on which offerings to the idol were formerly placed be interpreted as synonymous with the *tabla* above referred to, the question naturally arises whether the image below it represents the god to which the offerings were made or an ornamental support for the table. We know the care which the Antilleans bestowed on ornamentation of their pestles, seats (*duhos*), and utensils. Pottery heads, once attached to bowls as handles, — a most common type of clay objects from Porto Rico and Santo Domingo, — are often called *zemís*, but there is every reason to doubt that these objects were ever used as idols. These clay heads are regarded as ornamental, possibly grotesque, symbols of gods, but it is hardly probable that they served as idols. It may readily be believed that the *tabla*, on which we are told offerings were placed, might have had bases elaborately ornamental, possibly standing before the idol itself. The preponderance of evidence as to the identification of the image as an ornate support, a table, or an idol, seems to the author to justify the belief that the figure is an idol.

While it was supposedly on this table that the food offerings were laid in connection with Haitian prayers and other rites, it is probable also that when cohiba was performed tobacco or some herb used as snuff likewise was placed on it and inhaled into the nostrils through a bifurcated tube. This form of ceremonial prayer is mentioned or described by several early authors.

*Possibility of Identification.* — As yet it is not possible to identify the image with which this paper especially deals, or any of the large stone or wooden idols known from the West Indies with those mentioned by Roman Pane or other early writers on Antillean idolatry; but it may not be too much to hope that, as other specimens of various forms are described, some definite clue leading to their identification may be brought to light. In all attempts at identification made thus far difficulty has arisen from confusion of the mythology and the ritual of the agricultural Indians of the Antilles with those of the nomadic Carib. The names and charac-

ters of certain Carib gods have been transferred to the Tainans, and vice versa. Thus while the Carib gods Maboya and Hurican may have Haitian equivalents, these names do not appear in Roman Pane, Peter Martyr, Benzoni, Las Casas, or Gomara. No less confusion has resulted from the exaltation of those gods that confer material benefits and those that deny or destroy them, into ethical gods, or those of good and evil, a step lacking justification in view of the low religious condition of these people.

*Fundamental Religious Ideas of the Antilleans.*—In a general way the Antilleans, like all primitive peoples, recognized the existence of a power inherent in all things, and, in order to influence that power so far as they needed its aid, they personated it in symbols. Being agriculturists, the most powerful gods to them were naturally those earth deities and sky deities that watered their fields and made their crops grow. Every cacique relied on supernatural beings called *zemis*. To all the powers thus symbolized offerings for abundant crops were made with ceremony.

The Haitian account of the origin of the human race from a cave, or an underworld, is a variant of a legend universal on the American continent of the birth of man from mother earth. This place of origin was the cave, or womb, of the mother of all life, Atabei, whose son was the great god Yucayu, the beneficent one, who caused the national food plant to increase.

As set forth in the following quotation from Pane, taken from the variant in Churchill's *Voyages*, the image under consideration hardly answers the reference to his description of these two *zemis*.

"They say further that the sun and moon came out of a grotto, that is in the country of a cacique whose name is Mancia Tiuvél, and the grotto is called Giovovava: and they pay a great veneration to it, and have painted it all after their fashion without any figure but leaves and the like. In the said grotto there are two little stone *cemies* about a quarter of a yard long, their hands bound and they looked as if they sweated. These *cemies* they honour'd very much and when they wanted rain they say they used to go visit them and they presently had it. One of the *cemies* is by them called Boinaiel, the other Maroio."

Peter Martyr speaks of the same thus :

"There is a certayne caue called Iounanaboina in the territorie of a

certaine king whose name is Machinuech . . . . In the entrance of this caue they have two grauen Zemes whereof the one is called Binthaitel and the other Morahu."

The main food supply of the natives of Haiti and Porto Rico before the arrival of the Spaniards was cassava, a product of the yuca root. The being who caused this to grow was naturally the great god of benefits, called by various names which Coll y Toste has cleverly reduced to Yucaya, and which may be called the Yuca god. He was probably represented by one of the two images to which Benzoni refers when he says, "They worshiped two wooden figures as the god of abundance." It is also possible that they were the two beings mentioned by Gomara as follows: "They had two statues made of wood, one called Morobo the other Bintatel, which, according to Pane, were worshiped when they wished rain. Pane says, however, they were made of stone; he calls them Maroig and Boirnail, names which Peter Martyr has metamorphosed into Morahu and Binthaitel. According to the several authors, these statues were in the Cave of the Sun and Moon, and we are not sure that one represented the Sun god, the other the moon or earth.

According to Peter Martyr —

"Some [zemis] they make of rootes to the similitude of such as appear to them when they are gathering the rootes called Ages whereof they make their bread as we have said before. These zemis they beleue to send plentie and fruitfulness of those rootes."

Sr Coll y Toste<sup>1</sup> has pointed out that the great god of the Haitians, Yucayu, called by various names in different accounts, — Iocauna, Guamonocos, Jocakuvague, Maorocon, — was a Yuca god, the beneficent being who gave and increased the natural food plant of the Antilleans. It is probable that offerings were made to him as well as to the Earth Mother for abundance, and their idols may be two wooden idols of abundance mentioned by Benzoni.

The zemis to caciques were messengers of the great gods or agents which did their bidding, and which were worshiped for plentiful crops.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Prehistoria de Puerto Rico*, pp 115-116.

<sup>2</sup> "For divers of the inhabitants honour zemis of divers fashions: some make them of wood, as they were admonished by certain visions appearing unto them in the woods."

While the author accepts Sr Coll y Toste's identification of Yucayu as the great Yuca god, he believes the well-known Porto Rican historian had gone beyond what is recorded in ancient accounts of the religion of the Antilleans when he writes: "Los zemis ó dioses tutelares, unas irradiaciones del gran Yucaju convertido en Yukiyu el dios protector de Boriquen." The author has not seen the authority for the statements by the same author —

"Llamaban Maboyas á los fantasmas nocturnos, que creían ellos rondaban por sus sementeras, atribuyéndoles pequeños, daños ocurridos en sus labranzas, los perjuicios en sus casas y las enfermedades de sus hijos y mujeres. Los Maboyas eran irradiaciones de Jurakan."

In early writings zemis are nowhere found designated *irradiaciones*, although they are repeatedly called "messengers," and were in fact subordinates of the great gods, being possessed like them of magic power to make the yuca grow, to facilitate childbirth, and to cure the sick. The distinction above made between *maboyas* as "irradiations" of Jurakan and zemis as "irradiations" of Yucayu does not occur in the old writings nor does it have the support of comparative studies.<sup>1</sup>

*Supernatural Beings Propitiated.*—There were certain nature gods to which offerings must be made to prevent floods and tempests from destroying the crops. Among these were Guabancex and her two messengers, Guavava and Coatriscbe. These are supposed to represent the god Hurican of the Carib or the Maboya with which they decorated the prows of their canoes.

The Haitian zemi Guabancex, briefly mentioned by Roman Pane, corresponds in most particulars with the Carib Hurican.<sup>2</sup> Her two attendants had power over tempests and floods. The accounts we have of her worship show that offerings were made to her idol to appease the latter's wrath, in order to avert tempests rather than to bring rain. There is only a remote likeness between the two "little stone zemis" of the Grotto of the Sun and the two images of the attendants of Guabancex, one of which was appealed to to bring rain, the other to prevent floods. In this respect the one was good, the other evil, but not in an ethical or a moral sense.

<sup>1</sup> *Opia* is a name given by Pane for spirits that wander about by night.

<sup>2</sup> The Carib god Iuracan (Huracan) is not mentioned by that name by either Roman Pane or Peter Martyr.

Of this female zemi Roman Pane writes :

“Guabancex was in the countrey of the great cacique whose name was Aumatex ; and they say, it is a woman cemi, and has two others with it : one a crier the other gatherer or governor of the waters. When Guabancex is angry, they say, it raises the winds and waters, overthrows houses and shakes the trees. This cemi they say is a female and made of stones of that country. The other two cemís that are with it are call'd one of them Guatauva, and is a cryer that by order of Guabancex makes proclamation for all other cemís of that province to help to raise a high wind and cause much rain. The other is Coatrische<sup>1</sup> who they say gathers the waters in the vallies among the mountains and then lets them loose to destroy the country.”

Peter Martyr says :

“They honoured another Zemes in the likenesse of a woman, on whom waited two others like men, as they were ministers to her. One of these executed the office of a mediatour to the other Zemes which are under the power and commandement of this woman to raise wyndes, cloudes and rayne. The other is also at her commandment a messenger to the other Zemes which are ioyned with her in governance to gather together the waters which fall from the high hills to the vallies that beeing loosed they may with force burst out into great floodes and overflowe the countrey if the people do not give due honour to her image.”

It is evident that this zemi in the likeness of a woman was the one called Guabancex by Roman Pane.

In his account of the rites of the Carib it is distinctly stated by Davies that offerings were made to Maboya by the medicine-men before they began to treat their patients. It seems logical to infer that, if we can find an equivalent to Maboya in Haitian mythology, much the same offerings would be made to her as to the Carib deities. Guabancex may be the equivalent. Not less widely spread than the ceremonies to bring rain and increase the growth of crops or avert their destruction were the rites by which the medicine-men treated the sick. The nature of these ceremonies is known from contemporary writings describing the Carib and the Tainans. The god to which offerings were made by the Haitian *boii* before they began their treatment and the god to whom they first sacrificed are not

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<sup>1</sup> Attention is directed to *coa* and *boa*, serpent.

known, or at least are not mentioned by Roman Pane, Peter Martyr, or Benzoni. The *zemis* which were supposed to aid the *boii* in the role of physicians had the form of serpents. They assisted the *boii* when the latter had been mutilated by enraged patients or their relatives. There is good evidence from Davies that the *boii* among the Carib practised a serpent cult when they treated the sick. Their patron was Maboya,<sup>1</sup> on whose *tabla* or ceremonial table they placed offerings of cassava and *onicon* (a ceremonial drink), apparently invoking his aid before beginning their work.

*Conclusion.*—The technic of the statuette here considered is characteristic of the culture called Antillean, or Tainan, and the treatment of the subject is practically identical with that exhibited in the case of wooden figures from a cave in the island of Santo Domingo. These facts seem to indicate that, although we are ignorant of the locality from which the idol came, there is strong evidence that it was derived from either Haiti or Porto Rico. If it originated on the mainland, the fact adds great weight to the suspicions of several authors that Antillean culture made itself felt on the eastern coasts of Mexico and Central America.

The symbolism of the statuette is not pronounced enough to enable its identification with any of the supernatural beings described by early authors.

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<sup>1</sup> The good god of the Carib was called Icheiricon, the bad god, Maboya, but neither of these is mentioned by name in Haiti or Porto Rico. The god who sends sickness, according to Pane, was called Beidrama.